

# RISK CONTROL CONSULTING

## The Value of Communication in Safety

Whether you are the director of an operation or a supervisor of a small team, effective communication is the foundation of managing workplace health and safety. The impact of safety communication is broad and can include anything from the establishment of organizational direction and expectations, down to detailed procedures for dealing with hazards. The critical elements of an effective safety management program include management commitment, **communication**, employee involvement, worksite analyses, hazard prevention and control, and training.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant pressure has been placed on effective communication due in part to the dramatic increase in employees who are working remotely. This has led to organizations evaluating and improving their internal communication by:

- Implementing new communication tools such as employee apps that allow employers to reach employees, no matter where they are.
- Targeting internal audiences to ensure that every employee receives pertinent information
- Personalizing messages to employees to catch their attention
- Using “push” notifications to share urgent updates
- Providing multiple channels of communication delivery including desktop, mobile, email, video, podcasts, webinars, and mailings
- Establishing a communication rhythm that provides employees with a consistent cadence of communication so they are both informed and connected to the organization

### Targeting Your Safety Message

An important decision on effective communication is the manner in which the safety message is delivered. A key step in your plan is to identify the best communication tools to utilize that will provide your employees with the details. A few common tools for communicating safety messages include:

<b>Internal emails:</b>	Select a monthly safety topic inclusive of all departments that addresses a recent area of concern
<b>Quarterly safety newsletters:</b>	Focus on safety statistics, priorities, recognition, or other specific areas.
<b>Training:</b>	A way to communicate how to do a task and how to do it safely and is one of the first methods of communication used when preparing for a work task.
<b>Safety bulletin boards:</b>	Where various safety topics and information are provided.

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<b>Safety meetings or toolbox talks:</b>	Discuss work tasks and the associated hazards of each task to ensure safety of work crews.
<b>Labels:</b>	Found on almost every piece of equipment, tool, and chemical in the workplace. Manufacturers put these labels on for a reason.
<b>Podcasts or webinars:</b>	Where a particular safety topic or priority is reviewed. Interaction is critical to ensure both engagement and knowledge.
<b>Internal websites:</b>	Provide real-time updates and also align with a commonly used communication pathway that most employees use regularly.
<b>Mobile devices:</b>	Are everywhere and with your employees nearly all the time. As communication methods have evolved, providing instant mobile access is the expectation. Using a mobile communication strategy is now seen as a necessity for most communication plans.

## Establish a Communication Strategy

Communication is not a singular event, but rather a multifaceted, well planned, and time-sensitive strategy that takes resources to be effective and support organizational safety goals. The value in establishing a safety communication strategy include:

- Ensuring clear safety goals and objectives for the organization
- Providing clear and consistent information to the target audience
- Providing real-time information to address safety during operational execution

Establishing a communication strategy takes a well thought-out approach that considers several points. Think about how many times you have walked past a sign and not noticed it was there. This is especially true if you walk by it frequently. When it comes to how to best deliver information that will get noticed, the same old approach will likely not lead to a different outcome.

Communication in the age of mobile devices, a generation expecting instant information, and competing demands for attention require a holistic communication strategy that utilizes multiple delivery methods.

Below are a few points to consider as you evaluate your communication strategy:

### *Audience:*

- Who is the target of the communication effort?
- Is there different communication content based on function, role, or location?

### *Message Content:*

- Does the message clearly identify the type of message? For example, is the content informational, require action, time-sensitive, or require a response?
- Is the length and details of the content aligned to the type of message? For example, is the required action at the end of several pages of content or is it clearly identified near the beginning of the message?

### *Delivery Method(s):*

- In what method will the communication be provided?
- For example, the delivery methods could include:

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- Posters, bulk mail, emails, letters, documents, live conference calls/internet, telephone conferences, real-time text messages, social media posts, blog posts, or face-to-face.
- Does the communication delivery method consider multiple delivery methods?
- Does the delivery method consider the end user (for example, does the target audience prefer text message or social media communication)?

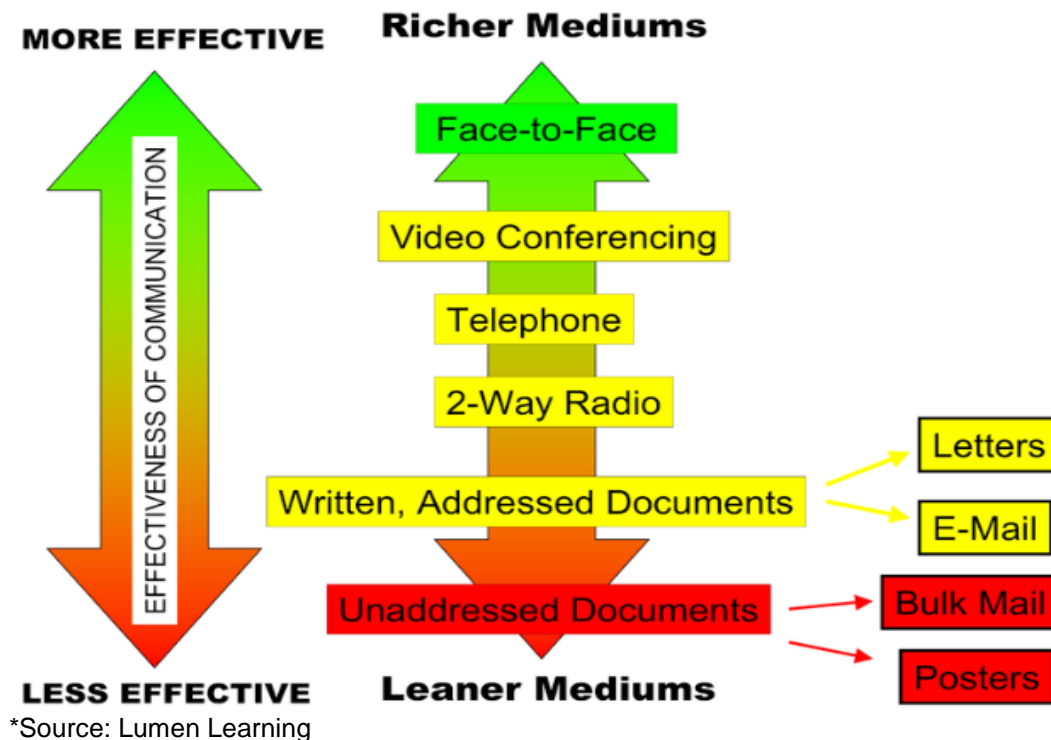
*Schedule:*

- When is the most effective time of day, month, or hour to communicate each message?
- What is the planned frequency of communication?
- Does the communication need to be “just in time?”
  - Meaning are there jobs or activities that need access to the communication at the time (for example, Job Hazard Assessment–JHA)?

*Message Source:*

- What authority, department, or representative does the communication come from?
- Is the message source best suited for the message type?

The chart below provides consideration for effectiveness of various methods of communication.



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## Measuring Effectiveness of Communication

Having a structured communication plan takes resources, time, and budget. It's important to ensure that there is more than perceived value from your communication efforts. All effective internal communication plans include measures of effectiveness. Below are a few to consider:

1. Set a baseline to measure against  
This may include completion of an anonymous employee survey where you collect responses to several key measures of your safety communication effort (ex. method of delivery, value of content, etc.).
2. Engagement measurement

Depending upon the method used, being able to track employee engagement with your communication is important. For example, if an email communication is used, tracking the number of opened emails or clicks on links.

3. Other key performance indicators (KPI's)
  - a. Measurement of the variety of communication methods used
  - b. Measurement of responses to communication (when requested) from target audience
  - c. Measurement of action/outcome from communication (ex. employees to complete training by X-date)
  - d. Turnover—include communication questions in exit interview

## Resources:

CDC: Workplace Health Promotion—Communication  
<https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/planning/communications.html>

SHRM: Developing Effective Safety Management Programs  
<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/developingsafetymanagementprograms.aspx>

For additional information contact:  
Tribal First Risk Control Solution Center Toll Free Help Line: (888) 737-4752.